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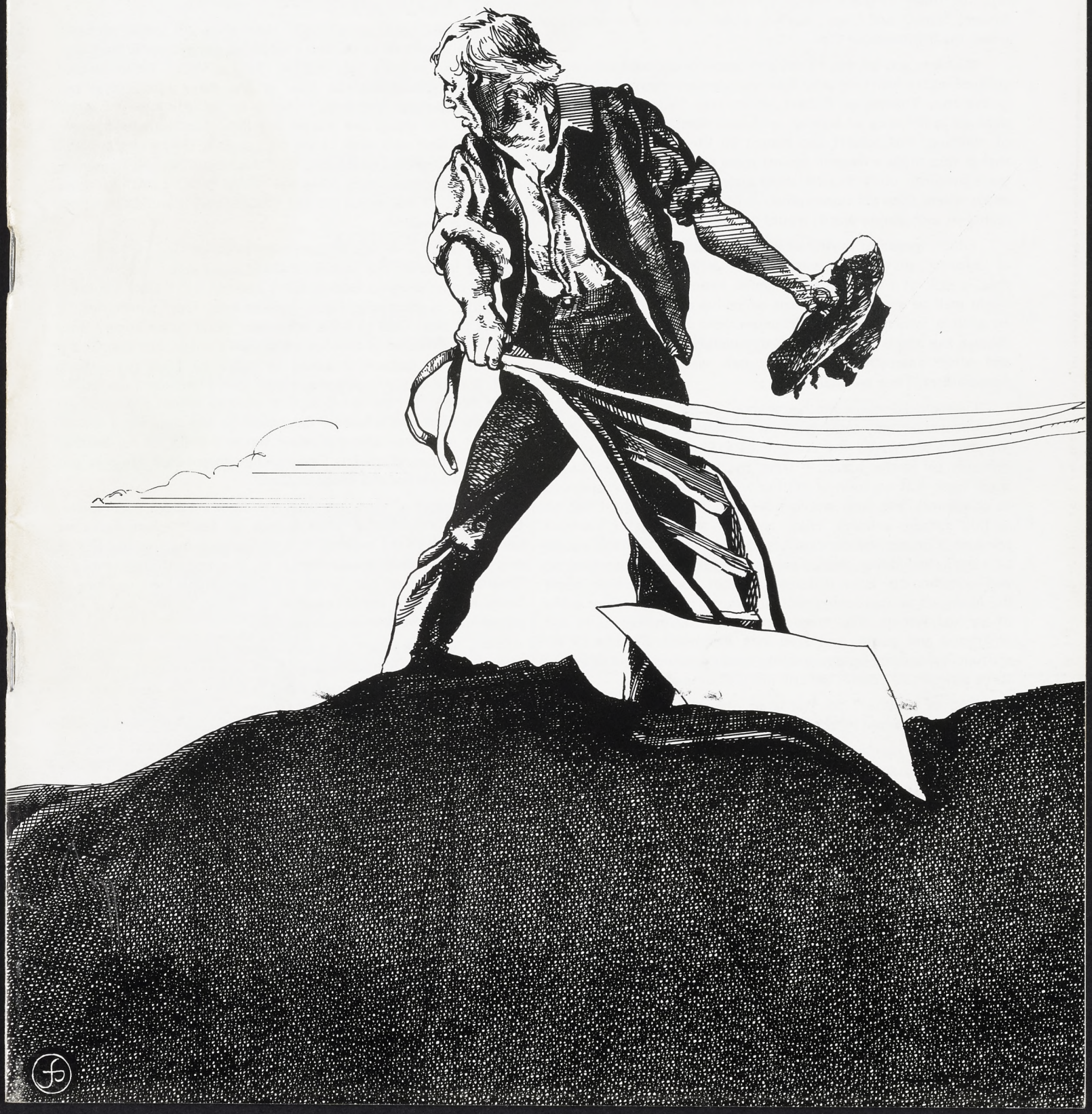
IN UNITY

INCLUDING **The Gay Christian**

75 CENTS



Thomas Aquinas in the Summa Theologica states that all names for God are analogies. God is "father", but not a human male, "mother" but not a female, "rock of our salvation," but not made of stone certainly, "Rose of Sharon," but not a flower, "eagle" and "hen" but not a bird. To say other wise is to lessen the infinitude of God.

Customs and myths, rituals and usages become established in cultures and remain long after their usefulness has ended. Language is like this. Theologian Robert Jensen says "A language activity pursued in defiance of history, with ears stopped to the question of meaning, will pervert and distort all life. The language itself that is thus made a weapon against sense and honesty will disintegrate inwardly until its utterances arrive at that point of logical chaos where they are nonsensical. A life that sought its religious reality in such empty words would be what is meant by hell."

Tillich speaks of myths which have outlived their usefulness as "broken" myths. The warrior God, Jahweh, to a generation that is sick of the conquest of small nations by the powerful, might well be a mythic concept which has outlived its time, and an analogy which may need to be replaced by another. It is not Jahweh but the tribal warrior myth which is the "broken" image, and other descriptions and attributes need to be found for Jahweh/Eloi. They are there.

I was a child whose mother abandoned the family when I was not yet a year old, and I grew up motherless. It was with great joy that I discovered the concept of El Shaddai – the God who nurtures us at the breast – from the Hebrew word for breast shad. Here was an infinite mother whom I had not experienced in childhood, and who would now hold me eternally. I had an earthly father, a harsh, cold, arrogant and vengeful Calvinist minister. For me, the concept of "God as Father" brings images of a stern, forbidding, angry Jahweh, the jealous God, disapproving and condemning. How different another person's image might be. Many of us had loving mothers, nurturing and caring; many of us had fathers who loved, protected, and guided us in our childhood and youth, and even into adulthood. Because of his attitude toward my homosexuality, I have not seen my father but three times in 20 years. I am still not welcome at home.

God as "Father" for me is an unhappy image. God as El Shaddai provides me with a loving alternative.

For many people in our community, the use of "father" or "mother" as a name for God may well be an unfortunate choice.

To doctrinally insist that we worship "God the Father" may well divide many people who need to be included in our community.

We must not mistake God for our words for God; God does not change although our efforts to describe God may.

All names for God are accurate images of God, for it was Origen who first helped us to realize that all names for God are merely images, pictures. No name for God truly succeeds in describing God. If we are honest, we have no word for God which truly captures all of God's attributes. Yet every way we speak of God describes some attribute accurately.

How shall we name God? How shall we speak of God? Scripture speaks to us of God's words in describing Godself only in action, or as Mary Daly affirms, "God as Verb." We know God not as something we can look at and name (nominally) but verbally, by what God does. Hebrew, by its structure, is a verbal language. All things are named by their function. In Hebrew, we find a God who says, "I am the Lord thy God which brought thee out of the land of Egypt." God describing Godself by action. Asked for a name, God's reply was "I AM THAT I AM" (or more accurately, "I AM WHAT I AM BECOMING") and God, whose very name is action.

We become so sure of our knowledge of God. What do we actually know of the nature of God? Jesus says, "God is spirit, and we must worship God in spirit and in truth." God is spirit – ineffable, untouchable, truly unnamable. Our temptation is always to limit God to what WE know. What do we know? Only that God is like us in that we are in God's image, but that God is other than us because it would be hubris to think that we are God. We are in God's image and after God's likeness. I am female and a mother. If I am like God, God must be female and a mother. You are male and a father? God must be like you and a father. What of my sister who has never borne a child, or my brother who has not sired one? Is God not like them also? Are they not also in the likeness and image of God?

All images of God are true, yet none of them is complete. God is like a mother, a father, a rock, an eagle, a hen, a creative hand, a voice in the whirlwind, a non-consuming fire; but God is not these and only these. God is all this and infinitely more – Creator, ground of our being, the unknowable, yet capable of being known and loved, capable of loving us and acting as a powerful personal presence in our lives.

For you "Father" is a summation. For me, "El Shaddai" answers a deep-felt need. For each of us one attribute outweighs another, but which IS God? What is God? . We only have the visions of those who have caught a glimpse of the glory, and with Origen and Thomas Aquinas, we can only agree that by whatever image we describe God, our description is an analogy. I can tell you what God is like – I cannot tell you what God is. Tell me what God is like for you. Let us share our visions, but let us not limit each other's view of the glory.

There is a Zen proverb which says, "The finger that points at the moon is not the moon." Our different images for God merely point us to the same ultimate reality. Let us not insist we all point with the same finger, but let us keep on pointing to God, whom all may worship in spirit and in truth. ✝

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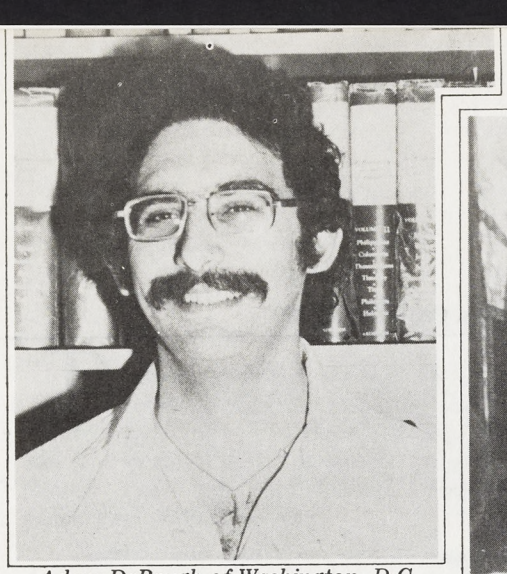
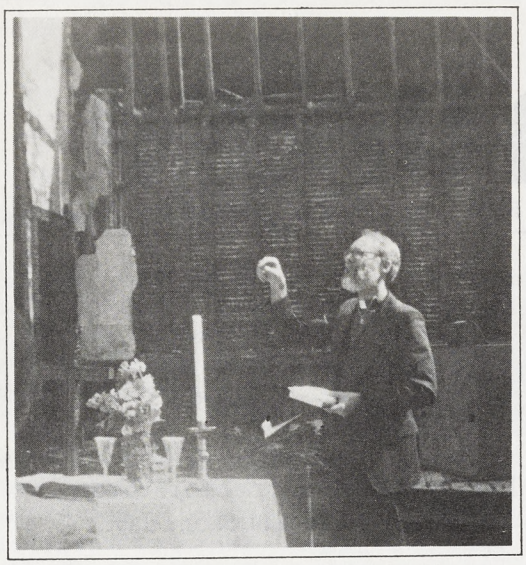
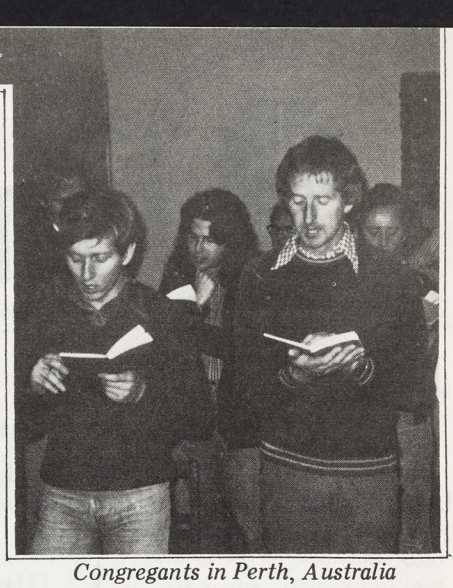


Adam DeBaugh of Washington, D.C.



Rev. Harrison in Santa Ana leads worship in the shell of the burned-out church



Congregants in Perth, Australia

fellowship family

SANTA ANA, CALIFORNIA

Christ Chapel MCC continues to grow in numbers and in spirit despite the recent loss of their church building through arson. They have secured a modular relocatable building (trailer) in which to meet while they consider the various options available to them. A large work party was held to tear down the burned-out shell and another is planned to totally clear the site.

Christ Chapel MCC has received numerous checks and letters of encouragement from concerned individuals and congregations throughout the Fellowship. This overwhelming display of support has strengthened the work in Costa Mesa, and has made it possible for MCC Christ Chapel to truly say "We Are Here To Stay." †

NIGERIA

Felix Lekee, Worship Coordinator for MCC Zaria reports that a new MCC Study Group has been formed at Port Harcourt Rivers, Nigeria.

The study group is led by Mr. Timothy Igwe Egile, and has nine active members. †

FT. MYERS, FLORIDA

Social Action Director R. Adam DeBaugh visited with Pastor George Covington and the congregation of MCC of the Palms during his tour of MCC groups throughout Florida in February.

Approximately fifty people gathered to hear remarks by DeBaugh and Covington, focusing on human rights issues and personal experiences. DeBaugh presented information on current gay rights legislation and urged those in attendance to inform their congresspersons of their stand on gay rights.

Media coverage of DeBaugh's appearance was very positive, and has helped to broaden the scope of MCC of the Palms' outreach. †

CANADA

The Bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada will now permit the ordination of homosexuals provided they abstain from gay sex. Most Reverend Edward Scott, primate of the church, says that public declaration of a priest's sexual orientation would hamper his ministry, and that therefore this will be a matter of privacy between the priest and his bishop. Still, "the church cannot condone the acceptance of homosexual acts". *The Canadian Churchman*, official organ of the church, has condemned the ruling as not going far enough, and for setting a double standard of different requirements for gays than straight persons.

A spokesperson for Canadian Baptists has condemned the move as "dressing the devil in a cassock." †

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DENVER, COLORADO

The Rev. Troy Perry joined the Rev. Charlie Arehart and the congregation of MCC of the Rockies in the dedication of their new church building March 4. The first service in the new facility was held Ash Wednesday. Prior to the purchase of the new building, MCC of the Rockies rented space from a Unitarian church in the city. †

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Pastor Stan Harris and the congregation of MCC Baltimore have formed "Transcare", a support group for pre and post-op transsexuals from Johns Hopkins Hospital. †

AUSTRALASIA

The distance between MCC churches in Australasia is greater than that between the east and west coasts of the United States. So it was no small feat for representatives of every Australasian church to participate in the Fourth Australasian District Conference, which convened in the beautiful, tranquil setting of the Naamaroo Conference Centre, Chatswood, Sydney.

In this district, the great distance between each congregation inspires feelings of isolation, making close communication difficult. This tends to disrupt the great sense of unity which MCC always strives to create, so our District Conferences are very important occasions for encouraging and strengthening fellowship within our district. The conference was no exception. The pledge for 1979 was cooperation — in the local congregations, within the District, and with the Fellowship at large. As we shared our hopes and problems, we once again received strength and determination to return to our own congregations and resume the task of liberating all people spiritually and physically with the dynamic love of Christ.

Several enlightening workshops were conducted at the conference. The Rev. Karen Linstrom (Pastor, MCC Melbourne) presented a provocative workshop on Feminism, which shook the very foundations of chauvinism in our group and paved the way for new alternatives in attitudes toward women, particularly regarding their roles in salvation history. John Batterbee of MCC Melbourne demonstrated the importance of Communication Skills. The Rev. Israel Hein (Pastor, MCC Adelaide) spoke on the importance of having an organized and intelligent filing system, and Duane Eaks, from MCC Melbourne, presented the realities of Relationships through the enjoyable medium of simulation games.

The Adelaide delegation staged a colorful presentation of "Godspell" as a prelude to the celegration of the Lord's Supper. The conference concluded with a cruise-party of Sydney's magnificent harbor.

The Rev. Jan Weymouth (Asst. Pastor, MCC Melbourne) was re-elected District Coordinator. Martin Grant (Treasurer, MCC Melbourne) was reelected the District Treasurer/ Secretary. The Rev. Cliff Connors was elected Assistant District Coordinator, but has since resigned that position due to illness. C.C. †

PORTLAND, OREGON

The Rev. Austin Amerine has resigned the pastorate of MCC Portland in order to work full-time as the District Coordinator for the UFMCC's Northwest District.

The Northwest District Conference voted to recommend to the member congregations an increase in district financial support (from 2% to 5%) to generate the additional revenue necessary to support a full-time, salaried District Coordinator. The Northwest District is the first UFMCC district to implement such a plan. †

NORTHEAST DISTRICT

For the first time exhorters in the Northeast met together in March for a weekend of sharing and study. Led by the Rev. Marge Ragona of Providence, R.I., the exhorters shared concerns about their ministry, studied liturgy and homeletics and enjoyed great fellowship and support with their brothers and sisters in Christ. †

TAMPA, FLORIDA

The Rev. Elder John Hose has announced his retirement from the active pastorate, effective June 1, 1979. Papa John stated that he is "resigning to make myself available to churches who may need my help", such as in interim pastor situations. He will continue in his capacity as Vice-Moderator of the Board of Elders, and will be available, after June 1, for speaking engagements and conducting spiritual renewals for MCC groups.

We all wish you a happy birthday, Papa John, and all the very best for a relaxing, well-deserved vacation.

Correspondence may be sent to the Rev. Hose in care of MCC Tampa, 2904 Concordia Ave., Tampa, FL, 32301. †

LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

MCC Long Beach has become the first MCC church to own its own building, lock, stock, and barrel.

Members and friends of MCC Long Beach gathered for a special worship service at which Pastor Bob Cunningham burned the mortgage, March 11. A reception followed the service, celebrating the hard work and dedication of the supporters of MCC Long Beach. †

THE UNITED KINGDOM

There are three new MCC Study Groups in the United Kingdom: MCC Kent, MCC Northwest in Newcastle, and MCC Liverpool. †

WASHINGTON, D.C.

MCC-DC Exhorter Allen Grooms has been selected the Process Coordinator for the Strategy Conferences on Homophobia in the Churches, to be held May 4-6, 1979 in Potomac, MD.

Sixteen denominations and two secular organizations have been invited to attend the conference, which has received funding from the National Organization for Women's Lesbian Rights Committee and Committee on Women and Religion, and New Ways Ministry (a Catholic group).

The first two co-sponsors of the conference were the Quixote Center, a Catholic justice community, and a joint sponsorship from two well-known Episcopal advocates of gay rights, Church and Society Network/THE WITNESS Magazine.

Grooms is the Administrative Assistant for the UFMCC Washington Office and editor of *Gays on the Hill*. He has a wide range of experience in civil rights and peace work. One of his priorities is to include representatives of minority and deaf communities in the conference. He presently serves the Washington, D.C. church as an Exhorter. †

The Bottom Line

t. earlye scott

Here are some things you need to know. I was in a bad spiritual space. I had gotten all locked up. I had begun to push God out of my life and to attempt to regain control of it. The situation was, in reality, a bummer. I was depressed, uncommunicative and empty. I had been preparing myself for a visit to my parents and I thought I needed to be immune to the ways in which they might hurt me. My solution was to cut everyone off. God in particular.

Until this point I had been doing well. My lover and I had just had a Holy Union and I was beginning to come out of the closet. A friend had gotten wind of our impending Union and her spouse wanted to write a feature story about us for a large metropolitan newspaper. I consented with the stipulation that my real name be withheld. I wasn't ready to come out that publicly. Actually, I wanted to remain employed.

The article was published and no one I knew at school mentioned it. I was home free. . . . .

"Just what are you going to do if something bad happens — I mean something really bad?" my minister asked. It was not gently said. I have noticed that ministers are often not low key in their approach. My minister's concern regarded my spiritual space. No surprise.

I still blame my pastor for what happened and could kick myself for not knocking on wood. Something bad did happen, the next day. Coincidence? No way.

When I saw the two students, I knew. Call it instinct or a premonition or bad luck. I had no reason to expect it, either. It had been more than a month since the newspaper article about our Holy Union. Since no one had said anything, I had relaxed. Bad tactic. Never let your guard down. I could see it coming now. Trouble with a capital T.

The girls said they had to talk to me. Not needed to, but HAD to. What could I do? Besides, I wanted to know what they knew.

"Ah, well, I can't say it. You say it, Jan," Beth stammered. They both nervously giggled. "It's really bad, Ms. Scott," Beth said. I naturally prodded them on, saying, "It can't be that bad. Go ahead." I was trying to be calm. I think I actually looked it. This time it was Jan who spoke. "There's a rumor going around about you," she said. The word rumor triggered my adrenalin. They continued the questioning. "Has there been a big event in your life?" Beth asked. "No," I replied. "Well, everyone is saying you got married," Beth blurted out. During the pause, I breathed a premature sigh of relief. "To another woman," she added.

I honestly can't remember exactly what I said to them. By this time I was on automatic pilot. I assured them the rumor was false and they believed me. One thing they said hurt me and another scared me. I was hurt when Beth said that kids had been asking her how she could be in my class. How indeed, I thought. When they said that everyone had been talking about an article about me which appeared in two local newspapers, I got scared. I had often spoken of the fear of them finding out about me. But, this was different. I was experiencing real agonizing emotion. I didn't like it.

Although I looked unrattled, my stomach betrayed me. I had to talk to someone and I knew I wouldn't be able to reach my lover. I called another gay teacher friend of mine. Getting through to her at school was not simple. I persuaded the secretary to get Carol out of class by saying it was urgent. I prefer that term to emergency because it doesn't conjur up visions of car wrecks and death. When she said to come over immediately after school, I figured I could hold on. I hoped.

I got to her house but was in so much turmoil that I don't remember the drive. We talked and agreed I needed a professional's opinion — a union person. We also agreed that I should not overreact. Easy to say. I got the name and telephone number of a top union person who just happened to be a Brother. I'd call him for more advice.

My lover must have had ESP as she called me at Carol's. We decided to all go to dinner and to make some plans. Why we chose to go to a restaurant in the center of my school district I'm sure I can't answer! Stupidity probably. After dinner I was feeling better. That lasted until I got home and the telephone rang.

I had a friend calling me to inform me that the rumor was also circulating among the faculty and administration. The plot thickens. Ugh.

Supposedly my real name was to have appeared in an article in the local paper. Panic. I threw the phone down on the table and started tearing through that paper. I must have searched it 25 times. My friend waited. I got back to her and she said she'd make some calls to see if she could get anything more. Since I didn't have the other local paper, I called friends to see if they could look. Each time I called someone else, I had to explain the whole situation to them. I managed to get everyone in an uproar.

Until we called Lou, we couldn't find anyone who had a copy of the paper. But, she had just thrown it out. Not knowing what it was all about, she offered to get it. I wish I could have seen her in the midst of a snow storm rummaging in the dipsy dumpster for the Monday edition. She said she almost fell in the huge metal garbage can. Oh, what we do for friendship.

Fifteen minutes later she called. She had the paper. I told her what to look for. She found nothing. I still wasn't satisfied, so we called the night editor. He said he had never heard of such a thing, but did we know something? Time to hang up.

The full-fledged investigation had come up empty. That was good. Obviously the story had gotten twisted. One for our side. I only hoped the enemy wasn't searching as hard as we had. They might just stumble onto something.

When my heartbeat had returned to normal, I called the union representative. He gave me this advice: "Keep your mouth shut. Do not, under any circumstances, say anything." I wasn't sure I could do that so I had a couple of plans. I wanted to be ready for THEM. I even imagined bursting into the principal's office screaming, "Have you heard that terrible thing they're saying about me?" I also had a jovial approach all planned out in my head. I would simply laugh it off as a bad joke. You know, make light of it. I decided my best bet was to avoid the office altogether.

No one expected me to get any sleep and we were all praying our guts out. I slept great — no one else did, though. In fact, it was one of the best nights in my life.

I had no problem falling to sleep. I was exhausted from all the tension. I woke up, though, part way through the night, and so did my lover. Prepare yourself. I said to her, "It's OK, honey. God tucked me in and she was a woman." It was true. There She was by the side of my bed. She tucked me in and patted me on the shoulder. She was so gentle and comforting. I think it happened twice. My lover told me that she could sense the peace I felt.

In the morning I felt great, and God took my hand and together we walked into the building where my fate or future would or could be determined. I was strong and confident and totally trusted God. I soon found the answer to my pastor's original question. I found out what I would do now that something awful had actually happened to me. The bell rang. The day began. †

Holy Spirit MCC

When the name of our church was chosen by our brothers and sisters here in Des Moines, little did they realize the strange, yet mighty and wonderful way in which God would work in the years to come. Under the Lord's guidance and direction through the Rev. Jerry Sloan and the Rev. Don Eastman, our small group of believers grew in numbers, and applied for chartering as a church. On October 29, 1975, Church of the Holy Spirit received official chartering. In March of last year, our Pastor, the Rev. Alice Jones, and the entire congregation were invited to attend a revival at a local church. During the two to three week period of nightly services, many of our members stepped out on faith and received God's promise of power through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Members of the church holding the revival shared in our happiness as almost each of our members were slain in the Spirit. Later we were to discover that it was believed that we had each been "delivered" from homosexuality. But God's promise of power for us as Christians did not then, nor now, require our deliverance from our sexual orientation. The only requirement for receiving the infilling is to have already received Christ into your heart as your personal Savior, and to, in faith, receive the Holy Spirit.

The Mid-Central District Conference was held September 1 - 3, 1978 in Des Moines, and members from other congregations within this district also received the infilling of the Holy Spirit during this weekend of sharing, taking this new power from God back to their respective churches.

Due to the various religious backgrounds of the MCC members, introduction to the infilling, and the gifts, of the Holy Spirit must be a gradual process. This process MUST be according to God's time-plan. Sometimes in our human haste to experience God's touch upon us, we can unknowingly place potential stumbling blocks in the paths of our sisters and brothers. As Christians, we are all learning to be more sensitive to the needs of each other, which means we may not be able to become as involved in some things as quickly as we would sometimes like. Not until two or three months after the initial experience last year were the gifts of the Spirit manifested in our church services, and this was also a gradual process of introduction. Later, prayer meetings, which had previously faltered, were begun again with new power and faith. In our studies of God's word and in allowing God to work in our lives according to the divine timetable, we have found that all things do "work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to God's purpose" (Romans 8:28).

God has confirmed to us our church name and truly showered love upon us during this past year. We praise and thank the Lord for these blessings and pray that the Lord will bless your congregations as richly in the year ahead. C.E. †

Roy Birchard:

Counting the Cost

or My Beautiful Tiffany Necklace

On February 17, 1978, while I was serving as founding pastor of Tidewater in Norfolk, Virginia, I received a letter from Manpower Temporary Services, Inc. The letter read:

Dear Roy,

CONGRATULATIONS!!!!

We are pleased to tell you that we received an excellent rating on you from one of our customers. We are proud to have you as a Manpower employee. Now that you have received this excellent rating, you need only to accumulate 400 hours in one year to receive your beautiful Tiffany necklace. Just think, you're already halfway there! We will be monitoring your hours and when you qualify, we will notify you of our next awards presentation.....

I carried this letter with me to the Eastern Ministers' Conference, and it got some laughs as I showed it around to the other ministers. While my sense of humor was tickled by it, I will admit that to a certain extent I also wondered to myself how it was that after four years of undergraduate education, three years of expensive seminary training and eight years of ministerial experience the hard fact was that the only way I could earn a living during my time in Norfolk was as a Kelly Girl! (I also worked for them.) I had no other marketable skills.

Walking home in the evening from my bus stop, I frequently passed a beauty academy and thought to myself how much wiser I would have been if I had been trained as a hairdresser before I ever set out to be an MCC missionary. Nobody ever told me when I was a seminary student that knowing how to type 74 words per minute would make the difference in how long I could continue as the missionary pastor of a new MCC group. The fact that I didn't have marketable skills that could bring me an adequate income caused me to get into debt and affected my whole mental attitude about what I was doing.

When April 15 passes and you haven't been able to pay your income taxes, when your teeth ache because you can't afford to go to a dentist, etc., your ability to approach your work as a minister with *joy* is impaired. Endless complaining to the group you are working with creates a spiritual "down". And by the same token, covering up and denying your real human needs can lead to a "Christian martyr" complex that may have more to do with your ambition for spiritual heroics than it does with God's will for you. Realistically, given its size, the Tidewater group could not have been expected to support me full time; the hard reality was that I had to be a successful tentmaker, and a tentmaking minister is going to be judged both *as a minister* by the Christians (s)he is ministering to and *as a tentmaker* by the customers.

A Scripture which came to me quite frequently during my year in Norfolk was Luke 14: 28-30, 33: "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether you have enough to complete it? Otherwise, when you have laid a foundation, and are not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock, saying, 'This one began to build, and was not able to finish.' So therefore, whoever of you does not renounce all that you have cannot be my disciple."

That IS a hard Scripture, but as James 3:1 says, "My sisters and brothers, not many of you should become teachers. As you know, we teachers will be judged with greater strictness than others." Think about that when you think about your sense of call to the ministry. Are you *really* hearing a call from God?

Another area in which "counting the cost" is necessary is in personal relationships. Recently I received a Christmas letter from an individual who served for several years as a minister in the UFMCC. This person is now back in a well-paying secular job and living with a spouse who had refused to pull up stakes and follow during one of several "ministerial moves" that my friend had experienced. This person wrote, "God has blessed me since I returned. . . I have

At their recent meeting in St. Louis, the members of the Standards Sub-Committee of the Ministerial Credentials and Affairs Committee suggested that one of their members, the Rev. Roy Birchard, write an article for In Unity detailing some of the "grim realities" of ministry for the benefit of exhorters and others exploring calls to the Christian ministry. The article that follows is particularly addressed to such members of the UFMCC.

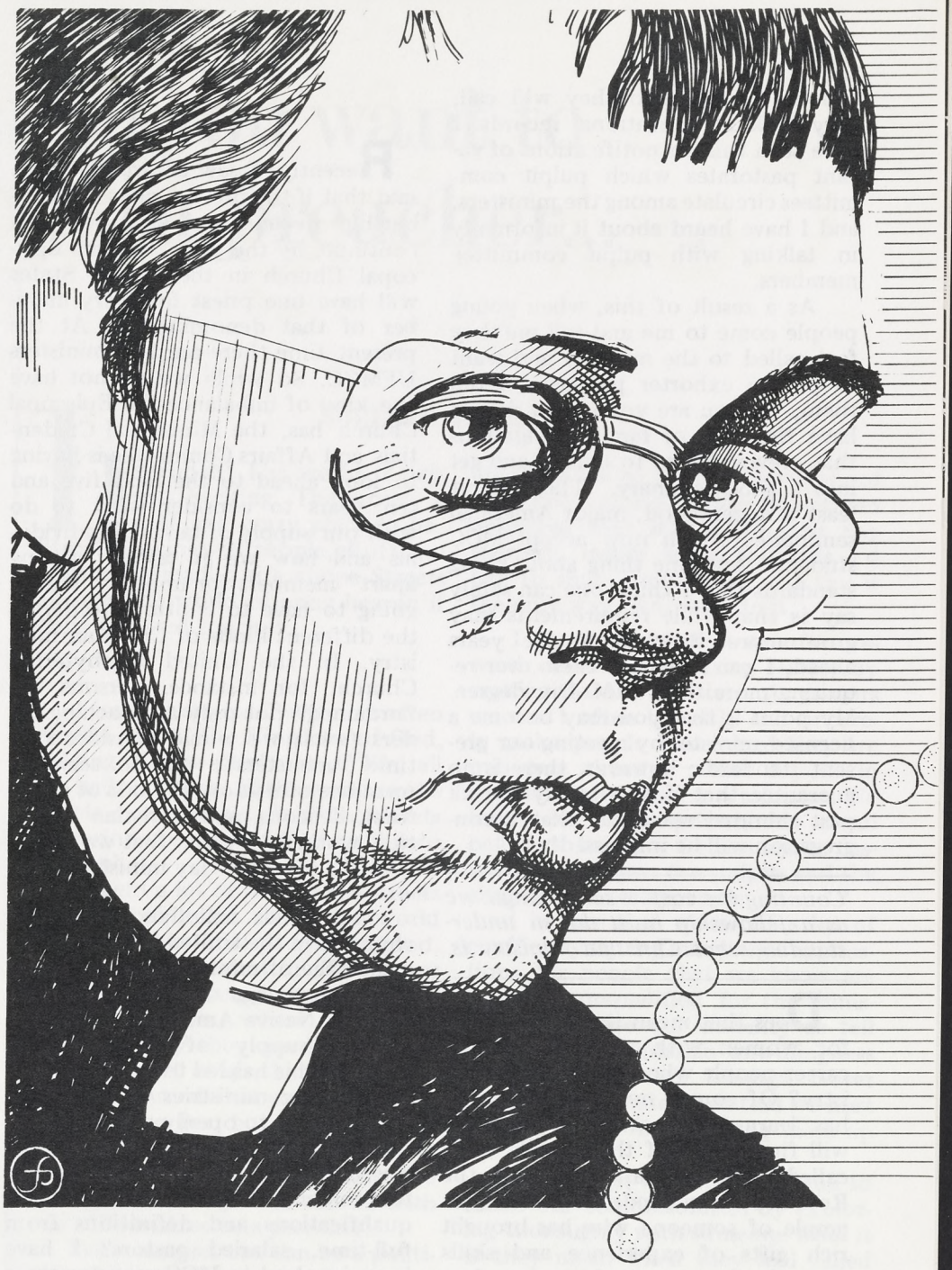
a good job with a solid future, [my spouse] and I are in our home, and life is better than it has ever been. This is in sharp contrast to what I endured during my seven years in the ministry. . . ."

I must confess I was envious as I read on in this letter about how this couple's house remodeling was going, where their last vacation trip took them, and all of the other sane, cozy, comfortable and reasonable aspects of human life as I really do think it should be led. In sharp contrast, I thought of the Christmas card I received from a man my age with whom I had once hoped to build a home life. The note in the card began, "Dear Gypsy. . ."

Jesus said, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but humankind has nowhere to lay their heads." While many of our ministers have been blessed with loving and long-suffering spouses, I hear enough from my colleagues at ministers' conferences and other meetings to know that many have had to go without for the sake of the ministry. People can continue to hope that someday someone may be willing to shoulder the bizarre burdens involved in living with an MCC minister, but there are no guarantees. I sent a Christmas card this year to someone and signed it, "I pray that you may be blessed as I have been." The person wrote back, "That's a good one! Do you really think that I, or anyone else, would even want to be 'blessed' as you have been? I don't think so."

Well, I had meant what I said on the card, because I DO think I have been blessed in the ministry, and if I didn't think so I would not have continued in it as long as I have. I would be out there somewhere renovating a house like sane, middle-aged, middle class gay males. Still, difficulty in personal relationships is one of the ministry's "costs".

A third area for "counting the cost" before becoming a minister has to do with educational preparation. (And I must emphasize that what I say here represents my own opinion only.) For almost two years now the Standards Sub-committee of the MCAC has been developing standards for the licensed and ordained ministry and the tests for District Review Committees to administer in reviewing candidates. Standards are rising. The current standards will probably



continue unchanged for a few years now. Nevertheless, the *members* of MCC congregations want their ministers to be as educationally prepared as possible. During the hearings last year on these new standards, the St. Louis congregation requested that there be no "grandfather clause" exempting currently-licensed and ordained clergy. *While this was not adopted, the hard reality is that increasingly, congregations able to pay a full-time pastor are declining to call candidates who lack a Masters of Divinity degree.*

Certainly there are good reasons why many of us do not possess such degrees. Women, middle-aged persons responding to God's call, persons from ethnic minorities lacking the financial resources, etc. — the experience of all these people shows us that the predominantly-white, male ministers whose previous denominations paid their ways through college and seminary received *privileges of education due to their birth.* (And of course plenty of people with M. Div. and Ph.D degrees lack the wisdom, love, and common sense that make good ministers.)

But call it snobbery, or call it what you will, when MCC congregations have the financial ability to be

choosey about who they will call, they look at educational records. I have seen this on notifications of vacant pastorates which pulpit committees circulate among the ministers, and I have heard about it informally in talking with pulpit committee members.

As a result of this, when young people come to me and tell me they feel called to the ministry and want to pursue exhorter programs, I tell them, "If you are young and do not have financial or family obligations that prevent it, go to college and get into a good seminary." There are at least a dozen good, major American seminaries which now accept MCC students. And one thing about rising standards that I think one can safely say is that while requirements may grow more stringent in the years ahead, I can't imagine them ever requiring more than an M. Div. degree. My point is that you may become a licensed minister by meeting our present standards; however, there is no guarantee that if you barely squeak past minimal standards that a congregation will be impressed!

'Counting the cost' is something... we as a fellowship must do, in understanding what Christian ministry is.

Does that mean there is no hope for women with children or mid-career people who feel called to ministry? Of course not. Someone who has learned the skills of parenting will find many of those skills being called upon in pastoring. And the Rev. Elder Jim Sandmire is a fine example of someone who has brought rich gifts of experience and skills from the business world and made a major contribution to our Fellowship. But District Review Committees and congregations can tell the difference between people like this and people who are afraid of their ability to succeed in an academic environment. When inexperienced and uneducated ministers try to cover up with bluster or resort to pastoral authority ("I AM the pastor!") to cover up insecurity or laziness, people see the truth. The current standards are not an excuse to avoid going to seminary; they allow persons who have educated themselves in life, and who have gifts to share, to share them.

Recently, I saw an article which said that if the present rates of membership decline and clergy growth continue, by the year 2000 the Episcopal Church in the United States will have one priest for every member of that denomination. At the present time there are 158 ministers UFMCC. So while we do not have the kind of imbalance the Episcopal Church has, the Ministerial Credentials and Affairs Committee is having to look ahead to the next five and ten years to consider what to do with our supply of talented individuals and how we go about "setting apart" members for ministry. We are going to have to continue to *define* the different kinds of Christian ministry. In the United Presbyterian Church, for instance, persons are "ordained" not only as Teaching Elders (what we would consider full-time "ministers") but to serve as members of sessions (boards of directors), deacons, and Christian education workers — posts that we in the UFMCC consider "lay ministries".

In most mainline Protestant churches in the United States there is a shortage of ministers for congregations involving ethnic minorities (Blacks, Native Americans, etc.) and an over-supply of white Anglo-Saxons. This has led to the growth of tent-making ministries of all kinds. Do we want to openly embrace tent-making ministry as a worthy, lifetime form of Christian vocation? Should tent-making ministries have different qualifications and definitions from full-time, salaried pastors? I have been involved in MCC ministry since November, 1971. In that time, I have been directly involved in the establishment of two different congregations and of the Washington office of the Fellowship. In two of those years since 1971, I was on salary full time by a congregation or the Fellowship. And I know that when I have worked at tent-making during those other five years that there were simply not enough hours in the day to do the kind of scholarly reading and preparation for sermons and classes that I am now able to do as a full-time, salaried pastor. I assume that the Elders who read my monthly reports took all this into account. But I personally experienced a sense of "trading on old seminary classwork" and wondered if I was being fair to the congregations I served in allowing myself to get mentally stagnant.

Then too, not all tent-making ministry involves pastoral work. Several years back the Fellowship reached the understanding that not all ministers are necessarily gifted to be pastors. We accepted the wide range of ministry gifts. By the same token, though, churches have felt it necessary to make sure that "specialized ministry" was not an effortless way to wear a collar. There has been something of a tendency for some of our ministers to drift to our larger congregations in urban areas with comfortable gay ghettoes and then become perennial "ministers in residence". Local congregations know which staff ministers and ministers in residence are active and which are enjoying the fruits of the collar without hoeing in the garden.

Finally, in addition to asking individuals who feel called to the ministry to "count the cost" on their lives before they set out examining the option of tent-making ministry, the Fellowship as a whole has some other "counting" to do. Because I believe we still possess many talented Christians who DO genuinely feel called to the ministry, I think we must now examine what we hope to receive from our ministers, and what the opportunities are likely to be in the next few years. The fact is that even within the United States there are still a considerable number of "calls from Macedonia" being heard. Granted, we need to seriously work at consolidating the ministries and congregations we already have, try to make certain that this year's MCC of Remarkable Witness does not reappear next year as MCC of Village of the Damned. But the fact is, we ARE still receiving calls from communities that need new ministries developed. A survey done two years ago turned up 100 U.S. cities lacking MCC groups but with sufficient population to support at least one each, compared with cities of similar population already supporting an MCC congregation.

We must be honest with candidates for ministry that the Fellowship is under a Christian obligation

to respond to those "calls from Macedonia", and that they may have to count on shouldering some of that work load even as others of us have in the past. I say this with fear and trembling, knowing that the congregation I presently serve sent a young seminary graduate who was its interim pastor before me to serve an MCC group with 15 members -- and with the burden of some spectacular debts for that expensive, if desirable, seminary education. I think ministers like this will also need to be honest with the rest of us that there are limits as to how long we can expect them to carry superhuman loads — and that we need to help them lest they give up on us in despair.

Finally, as we look ahead, we need to take a fresh look at a form of ministry that has mostly been a dismal failure among us up to now. I mean "holy orders" or religious communities working around a particular mission. No one among us has been more harshly critical of some of these attempts than myself. Up to now, I think our experiments have confused the wearing of collars and the burning of incense with genuine calls to needed ministries. A couple of years ago I had close exposure to an attempt to adopt St. Benedict's Rule by a group in our Washington, DC church. The Society for the Reign of Christ probably would have been wiser to throw out St. Benedict's Rule at the very beginning rather than chipping away bits and pieces of it as inappropriate for our context until nothing but the costumes and titles were left. It will take some strong and wise personalities to make something like a Christian community work. But maybe its time will come. There ARE modern Christian communities around that are successful witnesses, such as the Community for Creative Non-Violence associated with Washington, D.C.'s Church of the Savior, or the Koinonia Community in rural Georgia, founded by Clarence Jordan in the 1940's, or the community that produces *Sojourners* magazine. But if we attempt such efforts within UFMCC, these experiments really *must* require our best, most competent and dedicated leadership. We mouth respect for the notion of "the priesthood of all believers." But are any of us willing to lay down our *continued page 12*

So you want to be a preacher...

SHELLEY HAMILTON

Hallelujah! The world is rich and exciting. The world, a wild and crazy place to be. Streets dancing with people, all of them carrying a dream, a gift, a hope. Streets all over the world offering heaven if only we dared touch it.

I love the streets. They most often remind me of the Kingdom of God, holding all the rainbows of life, all the hells of living, all the world in the streets -- all the people of the streets mirroring the face of God right into my soul.

I spent a lot of time in the streets and noticed a lot about the world there. I learned that people are good. That people are beautiful. That every single human being — no matter where they are, where they have been, or why they are there -- has standards, set ideals that they won't break. I learned that some things are worth dying for, but a lot of things aren't -- like money, or booze, or drugs, or a lay. I learned that there are a lot of things one can do with one's life besides be a preacher.

For example, one can be a politician. One can give speeches and campaign for truth and dignity and rights for all. Or one can be a banker and help control the economy of the world, or at least a little corner of it. If banking is dull, then one can be a gangster or, better yet, a militant revolutionary, and help change the course of human history in violent and dramatic ways. One can sell popcorn and cotton candy or join a circus and be a clown. One can be any and all of these things and be a loving, giving, sharing part of our world.

So why be a Preacher? Especially in the UFMCC? I've been a part of this Fellowship for four years. During that time I've seen many preachers come and go. I've wondered about this, cried about it, and sometimes despaired over it. I don't have any answers, rather some thoughts I'd like to share universally, and this is the only way I know to do it.

I guess I think that we often reward devoted and caring service by making people ministers. As pastors we don't often honestly and sincerely make people aware that they are ministers already — that anyone in the service of God is a minister. We talk a lot about priesthoods of all believers, but how frequently, as pastors, do we open our pulpits and the altar of God to laypeople.

I believe that we avoid a lot of conflict by signing ministerial applications for people that we know are probably unqualified for the ministry. We define our inability to tell the truth as Christian unwillingness to hurt someone's feelings. Never taking into consideration that we hurt them a lot more by setting them up for failure.

As pastors, we sometimes fail to fulfill our responsibilities by exploring thoroughly with someone what it is they mean when they feel called by God. We fail to help people understand that God calls us all and to answer that call God doesn't necessarily mean we are being called to pastor a church.

There are some qualities that I feel people in the professional ministry in this denomination absolutely need in order to be preaching, loving, teaching, be-ing preachers. I'd like to talk about them some. I'm what you might call a grass roots kind of preacher. I walked out of the lusty, crazy, brawling streets of the world

The Reverend Shelley Hamilton is pastor of the MCC in Worcester, Massachusetts

to be a preacher in this little town of State College, Pennsylvania. I knew as much about being the pastor of a church as I did about being a wife. And frankly, being a preacher, at that time, had about the same appeal as being a wife. But I did it because I believed that God had saved my life and I believed that that was what God was telling me to do. I thought God was crazy — the very idea of a drunk and wild, demanding bartender becoming a preacher. However. . . . .

I learned to love. No matter what the risk, the pain, the cost, I learned and am learning to love. The quality of love one gives is always a determining factor in the fulfillment of life. There must be a wholeness in loving — it is not ever enough simply to love, one must always allow one's self to be loved in return. If a preacher only loves and refuses to be loved back, an imbalance and disharmony is created and that makes an unhealthy preacher.

To truly love someone is to tell them the truth. Telling the truth involves some pain and risking losing a friend, maybe a lover. But telling the truth has to do with love. One must preach with love, for love, and about love. Loving is forgiveness, and that's something with which God daily recognizes our lives — it seems only clear that we too must offer ourselves and each other that forgiveness.

When I was a bartender I spent a lot of time listening. Hearing. I remember that Jesus spoke often about those having ears to hear would hear. Listening is a gift and it's an invaluable learning device. I've discovered that folks don't listen to each other, they rarely even listen to themselves. I mean hearing what people say and how they say it. Sometimes people talk more with the sound of their voices than they do with their words. It's important to know what the voice, the sound, is saying. People always know when they are not being listened to. When we don't listen, we hurt people.

If you want to be a preacher in this denomination you've got to be compassionate. It's not enough to care that someone is hurting. You've got to be willing to die to make that hurt better. Compassion, caring with every fiber of one's being that the world is lonely, hurting, hungry, homeless, dying. Compassion, experiencing tears of rage and horror when injustice is a reality, when people die because of inhumanity inflicted upon them. Compassion, when liberation becomes a watchword for life, a way of being. Compassion, when you realize that the blood in the streets is your blood, the blood of your sisters, your brothers, your mothers, your fathers. Compassion, when you realize that crucifixion is right on the corner.

To be a preacher is not to be a mother or a father or a baby sitter. It's not a collar or vestments or lighting candles or leading worship. It can be some of those things and should never be other of those things. Being a preacher in this Fellowship means giving up all to follow Jesus. And I believe that more than anything I've ever said in my life. It means being materially poor. It means being a gypsy and sometimes being alone — alone in a way that only a preacher in this Fellowship can understand. Being a preacher in MCC means defying tradition and daring to tell the truth even when you know you're going to be rejected because of it. It means creating conflict and not accepting pat, respectable, acceptable ways of doing things. It means to say that if calling your deity Goddess is idolatrous then so is calling your deity God.

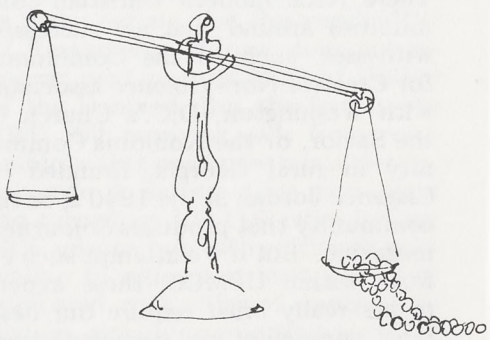
If you want to be a preacher in this church it involves prophecy, and daring to cry out to the world, "Yes, yes, yes, I am called by God, I have been annointed. I have been chosen. I am a prophet of God." It can mean being deeply and profoundly in love with someone and living away from them -- dodging passionately, daringly in and out of each other's life, never knowing where God will next lead us, and not caring, just trusting that God will guide and bless us and, once in a while, bring us together.

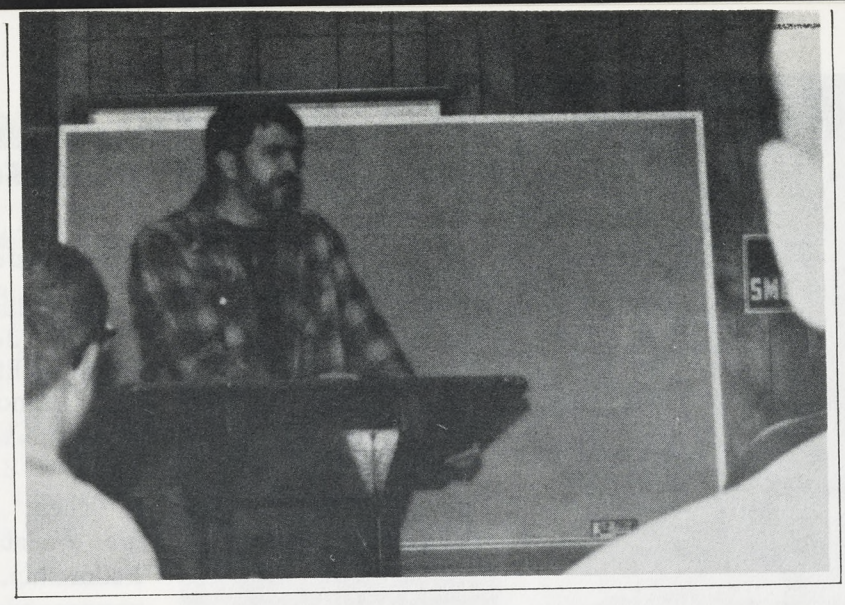
Being a preacher in this Fellowship means being a social, political and spiritual activist. Jesus was in the streets. He changed people's lives by hanging out with them, touching them, holding them, eating and drinking with them. He didn't sit in an office, comfortable and choked up in a clergy collar. That's why he was crucified. He wouldn't play by their rules, accept their standards or their values. He changed tradition, dared it and defied it. *continued pg 18*

Birchard "Reverend" titles and pull off our collars, or do we need the ego-prop they supply in order to feel motivated to do ministry?

I approach this myself with some fear that I may be trying to slough off the responsibilities of ministry. And yet, we have more Christian ministering talent in this Fellowship than we have pulpits to fill. What would happen if we could harness the very real talents some of our members possess to work on issues of justice, such as housing for the poor, war and peace, global development and ecology, or to undertake serious communal meditation like that experienced by the Trappist Thomas Merton, who moved gracefully back and forth between contemplation and Christian activism? All these matters interpenetrate, and we should reach out to these justice movements and spiritual developments and to Christians involved in them. This is why I am so interested and hopeful about the San Miguel Project in Mexico, and I hope and pray Rhea Miller and the others involved in it succeed.

"Counting the cost" is something our ministerial candidates must do for their own lives, and what we as a Fellowship must do, in understanding what Christian ministry is. The Ministerial Credentials and Affairs Committee exists to facilitate and provide a forum for such ideas. If you have reactions to this article, please write to the author or to the MCAC Chairperson, the Rev. Jim Dykes, at 1076 Guerrero St., San Francisco, CA, 94110. †





"What can Samaritan do for YOU?"

SAMARITAN THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE is the officially recognized educational institution of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. As such, STI provides educational resources for laypeople, ministerial students and clergy throughout the UFMCC.

LAYPEOPLE

Many of Samaritan's courses and seminars are helpful and interesting for MCC members in developing their lay ministry, especially for deacons, lay delegates and members of Boards of Directors. Many laypeople take Samaritan courses and seminars for their own edification and Christian growth.

In addition STI sponsors the EXCEL Movement, a lay movement for Christian renewal within the UFMCC. EXCEL puts on intensive weekend experiences called Excercises in Christian Community Living. The Excercise weekends teach what is fundamental to being Christian and they send the participants back to renew their local congregations. These weekends are available for districts, groups of churches, and individual congregations.

MINISTERIAL STUDENTS

The primary focus of STI is training students for the professional ministry. There are courses in residence presented in Los Angeles and correspondence courses and seminars available throughout the Fellowship. Most of STI's course offerings are aimed toward professional ministry within the UFMCC.

CLERGY

Several UFMCC clergy have taken Samaritan and seminars to increase their knowledge and skills and thus improve their ministry. Continuing education is becoming an important part of STI's role in the UFMCC, as Samaritan Seminars are offered each year at Ministers' Conferences. Some Samaritan Courses are aimed toward advanced-level students, such as HC 202- "God," and are thus especially appropriate and challenging to clergy.

WHAT DOES STI OFFER?

courses in residence

At the institute's facilities in Los Angeles, evening classes are held in 11-week quarters (Fall, Winter, and Spring) and in intensive summer courses. These upper college-level courses may be audited by anyone or taken for credit by officially enrolled students. The 60-credit program of courses leads to a Bachelor of Theology degree.

Spring Quarter 1979 (March through May) includes "The Johannine Gospel", "God", "Practice of Preaching", and "Pastoral Counseling Practicum".

Summer 1979 course offerings will include three intensive courses.

summer courses

This Summer (1979) STI will offer three intensive courses in Los Angeles which are open to persons throughout the Fellowship. In June a two-week course, "Sexuality and the Scriptures: Male and Female", will be presented. From August 6 - 10 (the week before General Conference), both "Prison Ministry" and "Sexuality-Related Counseling" will be presented as one-week courses. By offering these intensive courses just prior to General Conference, STI hopes to make them available to persons already coming to Los Angeles for the Tenth Anniversary Conference.

seminars

There are ten Samaritan Seminars available to be conducted anywhere in the United States and Canada. These one-day seminars (four-five hours) include:

- Homosexuality and the Bible: An Evangelical View
- Homosexuality and the Bible: A Historical-Critical View
- Oppression: What Is It? How Do We Handle It?
- Inclusive Language: Why and How?
- S.O.S. : Speaking On Sexuality
- Inside the UFMCC By-laws
- Parliamentary Procedure: Making It work For You
- Operation Resurrection: A Model For Local Church Renewal
- MCC and the Church Universal: Ecumenical Relations
- Church Management Workshop

These seminars and new ones to be developed are offered upon request at local churches, District Conferences, General Conferences, Ministers' Conferences, etc. Any one may audit a Samaritan Seminar, and officially enrolled students of STI (extension or resident) may take seminars for credit.

correspondence courses

There are currently five STI correspondence courses offered:

- Introduction to the Bible
- The Life and Teaching of Jesus
- Sexuality and the Scriptures: Homosexuality
- UFMCC Polity
- God

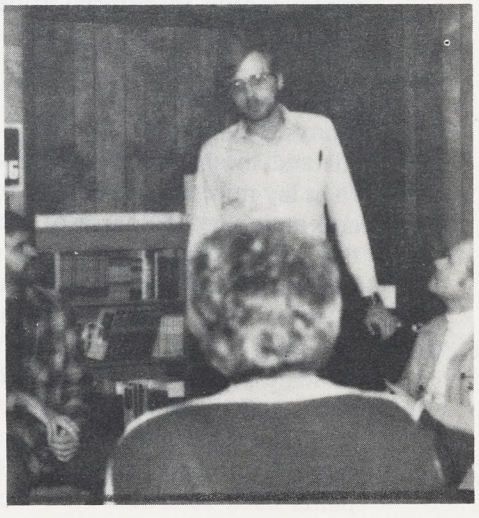
These correspondence courses are available to everyone in the Fellowship. Anyone may take STI correspondence courses, and they can be applied as academic credit toward licensure in the UFMCC as a professional minister whether or not the student is officially enrolled in STI.

bookstore

The STI Bookstore has in present stock over 40 titles, including books, pamphlets, and essays. A list is available upon request.

library

The institute maintains a library of over 3000 volumes, in addition to various periodicals such as Christianity Today, The Christian Century, Pastoral Renewal, Daughters of Sarah, The Other Side, and The Advocate. Anyone may use the library to read and research on the premises. Lending privileges are extended to STI students and faculty.



WHAT CAN YOU DO FOR STI?

may 6th

One Sunday each year, MCC congregations throughout the world are asked to contribute to the work of the UFMCC's Samaritan Theological Institute. The Board of Elders has designated May 6, 1979 as Samaritan Sunday, and on that day MCC churches are asked to take a special offering on behalf of STI, which plays a vital role in the training of the UFMCC's clergy and laity.

gifts

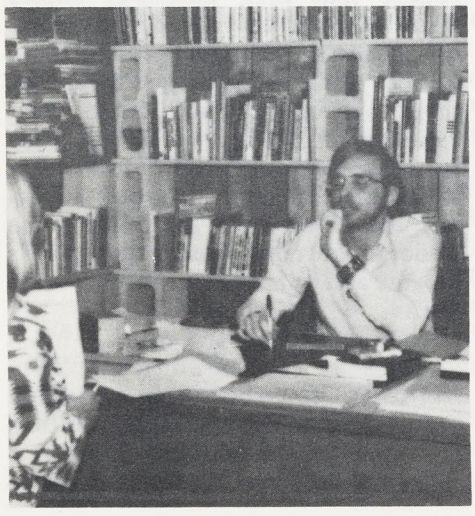
The STI Board of Trustees would prefer undesignated monetary gifts to allow for maximum flexibility and so that duplication may be avoided. Gifts from individuals and congregations may, however, be designated for any of the three priority needs listed here. Checks should be payable to Samaritan Theological Institute or STI.

scholarships

STI needs to have scholarship funds for resident students, correspondence students, prisoners, and clergy. The Institute cannot at present meet all the requests for financial assistance by those who wish to take advantage of Samaritan courses and seminars but who are unable to afford them.

educational consultation

The STI Trustees need some professional assistance in making long-term plans for the Institute. Now that STI has been recognized by the State of California as a religiously exempt school which can grant Bachelor degrees, what should be next on the agenda? What kind of educational institution is realistic for the UFMCC now? How should STI balance its residence program and extension program? Should the Trustees seek state approval and regional accreditation for STI? How can an institute in Los Angeles best serve the educational needs of clergy, ministerial students, and laypeople scattered around the Fellowship? To address these questions, the STI Trustees and UFMCC Elders are scheduling an educational consultation. Such consultant fees are very high and cannot be taken out of the present STI budget.



library

The present volunteer help is wholly inadequate for building up the STI Library. There are over 1000 books uncatalogued, and both a periodicals section and Christian Education resource center should be set up. There is an urgent need to hire a part-time librarian.

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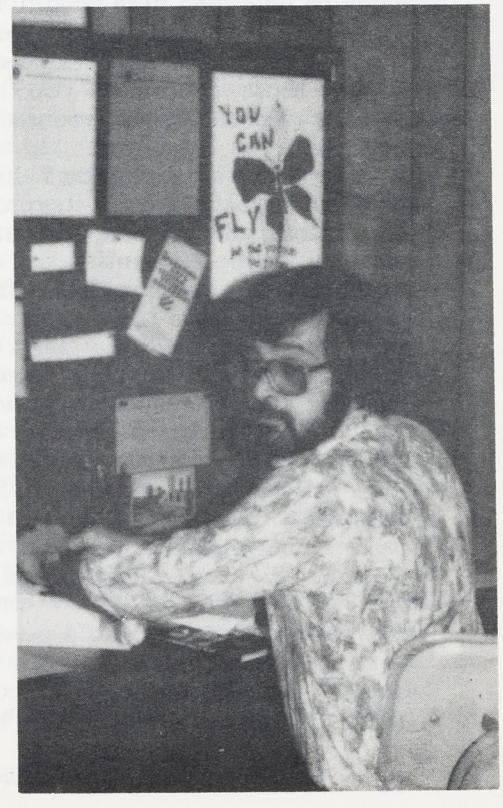


By Whose Authority

Larry Uhrig

Troubled people come to pastors and ministers of the Gospel. They come to share their pain and burdens and struggle to find answers to problems with love relationships, parents and family, self-identity, and questions of faith. We need to stop and ask ourselves why these persons choose to come to us. What have we to offer them that they do not get elsewhere?

Can you identify with this situation? Someone comes to you who is obviously very troubled and wants you to listen and provide some direction or some answers. You sit there and feel very uncomfortable, wondering what you should say. Far too many times you draw on all of the sociological, psychological and professional counseling resources you can muster without ever considering the question of why they have come to you. You have tried to be a "shrink," a psychiatrist or a social worker, and then, after exhausting all of those resources, you have perhaps reached for the resources of your faith.

The following statement helps to put this situation into its proper perspective: all problems of ultimate meaning, purpose, identity and self-worth are religious problems. Troubled persons have significant religious problems because they are wrestling with their own personal meaning and the meaning of life itself. These questions are by definition religious questions, and it is for guidance in resolving these questions that people come to pastors and ministers. Why is it that we are so reluctant to offer them the gifts of our faith? Why are we so slow to see that we offer a perspective no one else can — not the doctor, nor the professional counselor, nor the psychologist? We have

The Reverend Larry Uhrig is the pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Washington, D.C.

the resources — faith, knowledge of God, and the tools of theology and biblical studies — that allow us to directly address the religious problems of troubled persons. They come to us because we are the ones from whom they want to hear.

Why is it that you and I are so reluctant to claim the authority that is given to us, not only in Scripture, but also by the church and by society? We want to refer the person who comes to us to another. I am not suggesting that we do not refer to other professionals, but I am saying that we are quick to do so without first exercising our own gifts of ministry. A troubled person may need a psychiatrist, but s/he also needs the unique gift of forgiveness and absolution that the church offers.

Why do we withhold our gifts? It is because we have not yet come to terms with this authority. We believe that if we say what is on our minds to our people they will be angry with us. We think that we can only listen to others' problems, and never be so bold as to tell them that we think they are manipulating us, that they are not being honest, or that they are playing games with us or others. Whatever we can say as an honest expression of our own feelings, we withhold it. We neglect to pray with these persons. We are embarrassed to share our own personal faith or humanity by saying that we do not know or that we, too, are afraid. We are seduced by our own fears, and by concern for what others think we should be, or should not be. We have bought a myth that says we have to be Super Pastors and, most tragic of all, we have believed this myth to be true ourselves. We think we will be the exception to all the rules. Is it possible that we are trying to work out our own salvation by our own good works?

We withhold ourselves and our gifts because we believe that the authority for our ministry comes from the congregation, or from the Fellowship, or from the Elders, and we have not yet seen that our authority for ministry comes only from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The other side of this situation is also worth examining. Congregations believe that their authority comes from their pastor or leader, and that this authority is found by being close to the pastor. If someone feels that they are no longer close, they conclude that they no longer have authority. There often follows a classic phenomenon of group behavior: the group seeks to consume the leader in order to possess the leader's power, and this in turn is fed by the leader, who believes that his/her power comes from the group.

This process is inherently non-Christian, for the faith we share proclaims that all power and authority comes from God. Added to this is the affirmation *continued page 18*

What I See is What I Am

VIRGINIA MOLLENKOTT

Every other month, an onerous bill arrives at my home from Rockland Electric Co., also known as Rockland Power and Light. I am continually amazed at the amount of money I must pay for the power that gives me light. But I am even more amazed to discover that I can be the channel of another kind of power and light that costs me absolutely nothing.

In this other power and light, the light is the source of power rather than the other way around. In fact, the more I allow light to work, the more freely my power flows.

The first chapter of John's Gospel establishes the direct relationship between power and light in the realm of the Spirit. Speaking of Christ Jesus as the Logos or Word, John writes, "The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world . . . to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God" (John 1: 9, 12, RSV). That passage tells me that believing in the light, receiving the light, confers power upon me. My power comes from the recognition that I am a member of God's family.

Whenever I am living in awareness of my membership in God's family, I am of course relieved of all pressure to prove my own worth. I know I'm OK because of my Eternal Identity. I don't have to waste any psychic energy trying to battle self-hatred or trying to convince others that I am worthy of respect. I know that neither their opinions nor my own ego-generated fears can change the truth that my real life is "hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). So long as I'm living in the light of my Eternal Identity, all the psychic energy usually wasted on ego-thrashing is freed up for more important things.

John further clarifies the relationship between light and power in his first epistle: "God is light, and in [God] there is no darkness at all. If we claim to be sharing in [God's] life while we walk in the dark, our words and our lives are a lie; but if we walk in the light as [God] is in the light, then we share together a common life." (1 John 1: 5-7, NEB). In other words, as long as I remember my Eternal Identity in God's family, I know that I share a common life with God, with Christ, and with all the other members of God's family. There is no need to compete, no need to strive, no need to prove myself. I am free, authentic, and powerful as long as I am conscious of the light, but the moment I forget, I am plunged back into darkness and weakness — not because I have lost my salvation, but because I have forgotten who I really am and continue to be. My power comes from my conscious identification with the light.

How does light put out darkness? Not by a long and desperate struggle. The very same second I press the light switch to ON, light leaps up to displace darkness. It is simply a fact that light and darkness are mutually exclusive. As long as I keep aware of my membership in the divine family (that is, as long as I am enlightened) it is impossible for me to be enslaved by jealousy or resentment or fear or the other negative emotions associated with the individual ego that identifies itself with my individual body. Awareness of my Eternal Identity keeps me aware of sharing a common life with other members of God's family, so that my interest is in mutual supportiveness rather than in competition. For since I know that we share a common life, I know that what I do for others I am doing for myself — and for Christ. We are one.

How does it all work out in practice? Well, suppose a brother in Christ seriously misrepresents something I have written or said or done, thereby harming my reputation in the eyes of many people who believe every word he tells them. Knowing of his misrepresentation, I may choose to reply to him, or I may not. But whether I confront him or not, I must inevitably live with a basic attitude toward what he has done. I can either fester with resentment toward him (and resentment can manifest itself in dozens of ways), or I can learn to forgive him because he does not know what he is doing. If I yield to my ego-state of resentment, I will plunge myself into darkness because I will be forgetting that the brother and I share a common life in God. I will be distancing myself from him, and I will be validating his attack by treating it as if it could actually hurt the reality of me. (Attacks cannot hurt the essence of me because my reputation is not me; even my body is not me; my life is hid with Christ in God.)

On the other hand, if I perceive that the attack was based on fear rather than faith, and thus forgive the brother because he does not know what he is doing, I reinforce my own sense of identity with Christ, who said similar words concerning those who thought they were defending God by crucifying him. Furthermore, I am affirming my own sense of what is true about both the brother and me, because I know he was forgetting his Eternal Identity when he misrepresented his sister in God's family — otherwise he would never have done it. By remembering that he did nothing to me (even though he may think he did), I have reaffirmed the light in us both and have prevented darkness from engulfing me.

Perhaps the brother, seeing my loving reaction to *continued next page*

Mollenkott his attack, will be reminded of his Eternal Identity and healed of his futile illusion that he can enhance his own ego by attacking mine; perhaps not. Apart from affirming his ideal self, I am not responsible for his spiritual state. I am responsible only to live in the light, and thus to release healing power for myself and those around me.

I said earlier that spiritual power is free, and from the viewpoint of the Eternal Self (the life of Christ in God), that is true. For as soon as I perceive correctly (that is, lovingly), it is the easiest thing in the world to act correctly (that is, lovingly). But from the viewpoint of my individual ego (which the apostle Paul refers to as the Old Nature), spiritual light and power costs everything. That's because in order to live in the light I have to put to death my identification with my separate body and my separate ego.

At the moment someone attacks me — perhaps by saying something contemptuous to me — my natural ego-impulse is to counter-attack. There is an internal struggle: will I remember what I know (that my identity is not my body/ego, but is hidden with Christ in God, and therefore remains unharmed)?

If I remember who I am, it is easy for me to remember also that my attackers have forgotten their Eternal Identity, and to remind them of it by speaking only to their ideal self in Christ. But there is always that initial struggle with those ego-impulses.

To turn resolutely away from my ego is to turn on the light; the rest is easy. But the turning itself, the struggle to remember my Eternal Identity, is frequently hard. Once I make the effort to remember, light floods me and loving responses are effortless.

In the visible world of time, power bestows light. But in the invisible world of Eternal Reality, light bestows power. What I see is what I am. Let there be light! †

Virginia Ramey Mollenkott is a professor of English at William Patterson College in New Jersy, the author of *Women, Men and the Bible*, and co-author (with Letha Scanzoni) of *Is the Homosexual My Neighbor?* She will be participating in a panel discussion at the UFMCC's Ninth General Conference in August, 1979. This article is reprinted with permission from *Faith at Work* magazine, Vol. XCI Number 6, October 1978.

Uhrig that the authority revealed to us in Jesus Christ is also given to us as God's expressed will for us. When you and I sit in counsel with a troubled person, or stand before God's people to preach the Gospel and interpret the scripture, we do so because we are called of God, and therefore find our identity and authority in the Lord. If we are afraid to speak our minds, to say what we believe we are called to say, if we cannot tell our fellow clergy that we hurt, or fear, or do not trust them; if we cannot do these things because of what others will say about us or do to us — then I suggest that we have not yet claimed the promises and the gifts given to us by the Holy One of Israel and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the authority of Christ that has called each of us to ministry and formed the churches of this Universal Fellowship. It is to that authority alone that we are called to respond in faith and obedience, and that very authority is our own authority. Living that authority, nothing will separate us from the love of God or prevent us from doing the work to which we are called.

To God be the glory. God's great work is being done by those who are named by God and claimed by God to be God's own. †

Hamilton That's what it means — revolution, change, daring, defying.

I believe in the profoundest parts of me that the UFMCC is so much more than a church or a denomination. It is a major liberating force in the world. Talk about God acting in God's story. Imagine the irony and the beauty involved in God raising up the "untouchables" of the 20th century to be the liberating truth of our world. The last truly being first.

So you want to be a preacher. Fine, be a preacher. But before you do, walk through this world exploring all the other possible ways of making a living. Talk to God. Listen to God. God's got a vision of wholeness, mystery and wonder for your life. If there is anything at all in the world you can do besides be a preacher, then you shouldn't be a preacher. It's war and hunger and pain — it's the cross. It's wonderful and it's awful, rich and poor. It's never easy, never ever easy. But if that's what God has ordained for you then there won't be anything else you can do and that will be that. Nothing will be able to stop that from becoming a reality. But take some time, be gentle with yourself. Walk slowly, carefully. Listen to the wind, the same wind that spoke to Nicodemus, whispering the spirit and mystery and renewal of God's everpresent love. Hallelujah! †

NINTH GENERAL CONFERENCE

The Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches invites you to attend our Ninth General Conference in Los Angeles, California, August 13-19, 1979. General Conference is the time the Fellowship family gathers from all around the world to celebrate, to be renewed, to conduct its business and to redirect itself according to the important decisions made there. It is always an exciting and uplifting experience. But this year's General Conference is even more cause for celebration, it marks our tenth anniversary of ministry together.

It is not too early to start planning for this special event. A registration form is printed on the back page of this issue for your convenience. As it indicates, accommodations are available for us at the Biltmore Hotel in Los Angeles but it is advised that those wishing to reserve rooms complete this form as soon as possible. We are asking that you arrange your own room personnel; the UFMCC will not arbitrarily assign roommates. If you wish to reserve a triple, for example, please indicate the names of your other two roommates on the appropriate section of the form. (Also, triple and quads are in most demand so it is best if reservations for these be made as soon as possible.)

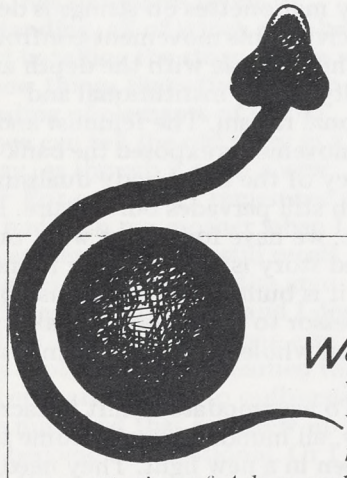
We have planned a very special week of worship and fellowship, music, guest speakers and workshops. We are looking forward to your joining us August 13-19 in Los Angeles, California where it all began ten years ago.

THE GAY CHRISTIAN

A journal of theological reflection from Metropolitan Community Church

KAREN ZIEGLER

CREATION MYTHS: BRIDGE TO HUMAN WHOLENESS



We experience our lives in the form of narrative. When we are very young, we hear stories which tell us about the nature of the reality into which we have been born. We form a sense of self and an understanding of our relationship to the world through these stories. In North America, the stories of Adam and Eve, Dick and Jane, the Pilgrims, the Indians, God, Jesus, and George Washington are among those which shape our sense of history and determine the human beings we become. When we are old enough to begin to tell our own stories (and this begins quite early), they are shaped by the worldview we have learned through the narratives we have heard or experienced. Because they are so fundamental, I begin and end this paper with stories.....

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i

Last spring I went to Philadelphia to debate Madeline Murray O'Hare, the atheist crusader responsible for taking prayer out of public schools. Ms. O'Hare is a radical feminist; she is very articulate about the (very true) fact that the Judeo-Christian religious tradition has helped to cause and reinforce women's oppression. The debate, held at the Philadelphia Gay Community Center, was most interesting, and I was of course in sympaty with many of her arguments.

Somehow, we got on the subject of homosexuality. Jay Deacon, the other panelist, and I sensed her homophobia and probed her to find its cause. She became so flustered that she began to tell us, in a very loud voice, that in Genesis God created Adam and Eve, and "therefore a man cleaves to his wife . . ."

Madeline Murray O'Hare, the radical feminist atheist, resorted to the myth of the fall when all else failed.

ii

Last month I complained to a friend about writing this paper. I could not, it seemed, find anything to write about which related to me enough to get sufficiently motivated. I was overwhelmed by my sense of exclusion, as a woman, from the entire Judeo-Christian tradition. I ranted and raved about how the Genesis creation accounts were totally absurd and destructive, how I hated them, and how I wanted to write about *my* anger, *my* theories, and *my* mythology. My friend said, "Well, take yourself seriously. Do it." So I did. It still amazes me that I needed someone to tell me that. Question: What story did I hear as a girl-child that told me that women ever take themselves seriously and have something to say?

The word 'myth' carries a great deal of excess baggage in our culture. It has the connotation of "untrue" or "unreal", and this gives us license to think that we do not have to take anything which is labeled "myth" seriously. Mircea Eliade, in writing about the function of myth, talks about "archaic" or "primative" societies. Again, this gets us "off the hook"; we do not have to acknowlege that myth serves us in precisely the same way.

For this reason, I prefer not to call the creation accounts of Genesis 1-3 "myths", even though they fit all general descriptions of myth. I find a more helpful model in Stephen Crites' excellent article "The Narrative Quality of Experience". According to Crites, religion consists of fundamental stories which create a sense of self and world for an individual or a group of people. These stories orient people to the "great powers" that shape the reality of their world. They reveal the kind of drama people are engaged in, and become the paradigms out of which people act.

Crites makes a distinction between "sacred stories" and "mundane stories". Sacred stories are stories which are too deeply embedded within us to be fully articulated. We can manipulate mundane stories by telling them in different ways, but sacred stories can change only very gradually.

> *People do not sit down on a cool afternoon and think themselves up a sacred story. They awaken to a sacred story, and their most significant mundane stories are told in the effort, never fully successful, to articulate it. For the sacred story does not transpire within a conscious world. It forms the very consciousness that projects a total world horizon, and therefore informs the intentions by which actions are projected into that world."*[2]

If we cannot set out to articulate the sacred story of our culture, we at least can pinpoint some fundamental elements of that story and describe how various mundane stories create and support this particular world-view. Our culture as a whole believes that there is one particular sex (male) and race (white) which is superior. Our culture is very nervous about sexuality and devalues the body. Hence we find in Genesis a male god creating the world *ex nihilo* by the "word" instead of by the "body". We find this god producing light and pronouncing it good. Woman is created for the use of man, and can be interpreted as the originator of evil. Heterosexual monogamous relationships are explained and sanctified. No other sexual relationships are given this sanction. I would suggest that the Genesis creation accounts articulate as clearly as any mundane story can the sacred story of our culture.

We live in a time in history when this sacred story is shifting. The "Death of God" movement in theology exposed the fact that we no longer can believe in a god who is both all-"good" and all-"powerful". The god-in-the-sky who manipulates our reality as though we were so many marionettes on strings is dead. The civil rights movement confronted white people with the depth and cruelty of our institutional and personal racism. The feminist and gay movements exposed the bankruptcy of the mind-body dualism which still pervades our culture. In short, we have found out what our sacred story is, and we have found that it is built on the relationship of oppressor to oppressed. It makes human wholeness virtually impossible.

To accomodate a shift in sacred story, all mundane stories come to be seen in a new light. They need to be told in a new way.

> *A conversion or a social revolution that actually transforms consciousness requires a traumatic change in a woman's story. The stories within which she has awakened to consciousness must be undermined, and in the identification of her personal story through a new story both the drama of her experience and her style of action must be reoriented. Conversion is reawakening, a second reawakening of consciousness.*

Her style must change steps, she must dance to a new rhythm. Not only her past and future, but the very cosmos in which she lives is strung in a new way."[3]

Narrative serves a crucial function in our lives; it helps us to maintain a personal identity by containing both past and future in every present. When we do not have continuity between remembered past and projected future, we are in danger of going mad. Herein lies the pain of conversion. If it truly does "restring" the very cosmos in which we live, absolutely everything in our lives is transformed. Old stories become useless and valueless.

I would suggest that the Genesis creation stories are among our greatest problems when we think about radical theological/social/psychological change. If "conversion" needs to happen today on a massive scale to accomodate the full humanity of female, black, and homosexual people, and I believe it does, somehow we need to relocate our creation stories. And we need to tell some new ones. Meanwhile, we need to defuse and devalue Genesis 1-3.

Again, Crites provides the key to a possible method for this process. Any story which is in our memory, he says, has successive layers of understanding, all of which may be recalled in telling the story. When we learn new things that effect our understanding of elements of an old story, we can tell the old story in a new way, as though it were a new story. [4] For example, I remember a fight I had with my mother when I was an adolescent. I can still recall the original experience of the argument. I was terribly angry and I desperately wished that someone else was my mother. Later, I learned that adolescents are subject to outbursts such as mine and that as I grew up I was to become more rational. Or I can tell the story in terms of my realization years later that my mother had good reason to be angry and frustrated. The "layers" go on, but the story is the same. All together, however, what we have is a new way of understanding the original experience.

This kind of "layering" has gone on with Genesis 1-3 ever since the creation stories began, thousands of years ago, probably as oral tradition. Most of the interpretations by the "Church Fathers" only reinforce the most destructive elements of the stories. But if we try some new directions for their understanding, perhaps we can diminish their power.

I would suggest that a helpful way to "defuse" the Old Testament creation stories is to try to understand the motivation behind them. I believe that what we discover is the same kind of fear of women's power that we found in the Church Fathers. In the face of the connection between this early fear and the later interpretations of the stories, the Genesis creation stories, along with the entire Judeo-Christian tradition, begins to seem like some kind of cosmic joke.

The Old Testament Creation Stories: Anti-woman polemic?

Archaeological evidence has proven that in the near and middle East, worship of the goddess preceeded the worship of Yahweh and other male "sky" gods by several thousand years.[1] The unity of the religious expressions of the earliest farming communities is striking. It appears that all focused their worship on fertility and the life-giving forces expressed through a feminine diety in human form.[2]

Toward the end of the third millinium B.C.E. life for the worshippers of the goddess suffered a massive disruption. A huge influx of Nomadic invaders swept down into Palestine from the north and destroyed, as far as is known, every major city then in existence; some with incredible violence.[3] These invaders had a martial outlook and worshipped a father god, often located high on a mountain and blazing with light of fire and lightening. The identification of the people indigenous to the area with the goddess and the dark slow earth, was incomprehensible to the people from the north.[4] It was at about this time that Abraham, the first Patriarch of the Hebrew people, came down from Ur into Canaan.[5]

From what we can see of the archaeological data and mythology of this area, it appears that the entire symbolic system of Near Eastern religion began to be reversed at about the same time. Mythology becomes confused, and it finally becomes apparent that this is due to the effort to explain the eventual victory of the male god over the goddess.[6] It is clear that what was going on in Palestine during the third and second millenium was a part of a much larger shift in the symbology of human cultures.

The northern invaders associated the goddess with darkness and evil. It is astonishing that an overwhelming number of myths from widely divergent cultures portrayed the goddess as a serpent, and explained the victory of the male god as the slaying of an evil monster. Zeus establishes the victory of the patriarchal gods of Mount Olympus over the earlier offspring of the great goddess by killing Tryphon.[7] In Hittite Anatolia, the storm god defeats the dragon Illuyankas. In northern Canaan Baal defeats the serpent Lotan or Lawtan. (In the Canaanite language "Lat" means goddess.)[8] In India Indra, the king of the Vedic pantheon, kills the cosmic serpent Vitra.[9]

Perhaps the best-known myth of this kind is the victory of the Babylonian god Maduk over his great-great-great grandmother Tiamat.[10] The beginning of the epic of this event makes it very clear that the oldest generation of dieties in Babylon was female. The first tablet of the Enuma Elish begins,

When on high the heavens were not named, and the earth beneath bore no name, and Apsu primeval, their engenderer, and the "Form" Tiamat, the bearer of all of them, there mingled their waters together; Dark chambers were not constructed, and marshlands were not seen; when none of the gods had been brought into being, and they were not named, and fates were not fixed, then were created the gods in the midst thereof.[11]

It is interesting to note that the only complete account we have of the Enuma Elish was written about 650 B.C.E., and the Priestly account of Yahweh's creation of the world was written about 550 B.C.E.[12] Oral tradition preceeded the writing of both of these accounts by probably a thousand or so years. The similiarity between the Babylonian creation epic and the first page of the Hebrew bible is, of course, striking.

In Genesis 1:2, "The earth was without form and void (Tohu webohu), and darkness was upon the face of the deep (tehom), and the wind (or spirit) of Elohim was moving over the face of the waters."

In the Enuma Elish,"The lord (Marduk) spread out his net and enmeshed her (Tiamat). And when she opened her mouth to the full, he let fly into it an evil wind that poured into her belly, so that her courage was taken from her and her jaws remained open wide."[13]

The name of Tiamat is related etymologically to the Hebrew word for the deep, *tehom.*[14] The amazing similarity between the two accounts continues.

Enuma Elish IV: 135-140 "The lord rested beholding the cadaver (of Tiamat), as he divided the monster, devising cunning things. He split her into two parts, like an oyster. Half of her he set up and made the heavens as a covering. He slid the bolt and caused watchmen to be stationed. He directed them not to let her waters come forth." [15]

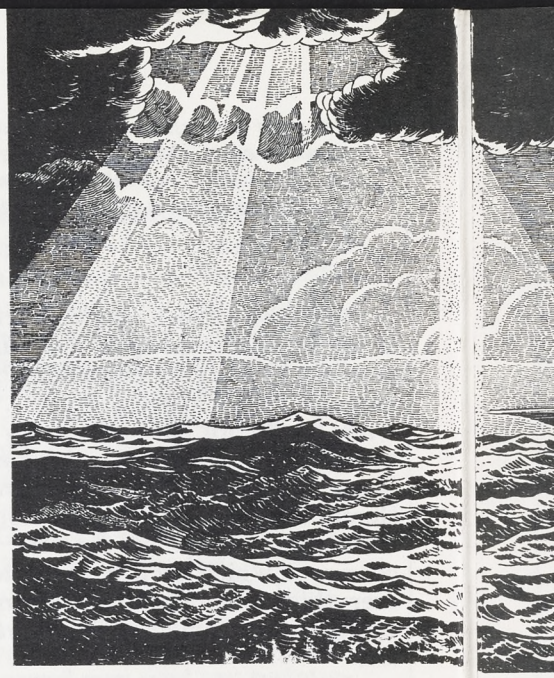
Genesis I: 6-8a "And Elohim said, 'Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.' And Elohim made the firmament and separated the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament. And it was so. God called the firmament Heaven.' '

What I find so facinating here is the male gods' fear of the waters; the chaos. In the Genesis creation story the first thing Elohim says is, "Let there be light." The darkness, as I have mentioned before, is not created. It is preexistant. Genesis represents a later stage in patriarchal development than the Enuma Elish. The great goddess who was earlier the mother of all things and who became a monster in the course of the Babylonian epic is finally reduced in Genesis 1 to darkness and waters; chaos to be feared. The male god is left alone to create out of himself. [16]

But there is another creation story in Genesis, and it surfaces several times in unexpected places. This is the victory of Yahweh over Leviathan, the monsterous serpent, which is mentioned twice in the Psalms and once in Isaiah. In every case, the reference is in the context of creation. (see Psalm 74:13, 104:24, Isaiah 27:1) The word Leviathan is etymologically related to Lawtan, the the name of the Canaanite serpent who was defeated by Baal, and also to "Levite", the designation for the priests of Yahweh. In the book of Job we find a complete, if indirect, account of the battle. It is worth quoting in its entirety.

Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishook, or press down his tongue with a cord? Can you put a rope in his nose, or pierce his jaw with a hook? Will he make many supplications to you? Will he speak to you soft words; Will he make a covenant with you to take him for your servant for ever? Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you put him on a leash for your maidens? Will braders bargain over him? Will they divide him up among the merchants? Can you fill his skin with harpoons, or his head with fishing spears? Lay hands on him; think of the battle; you will not do it again! (Job 41: 1-8)

In the Enuma Elish, Marduk "let loose an arrow, it tore her belly. It severed her inward parts, it rent asunder the heart. He bound her." [18] Later, "With his toothed sickle he split her scalp. He severed the arteries of her blood. The north-wind carried it away to hidden places." [19] The goddess, symbolized by the serpent, has been abused, insulted, and dismembered, along with her point of view. The myth of Leviathan is

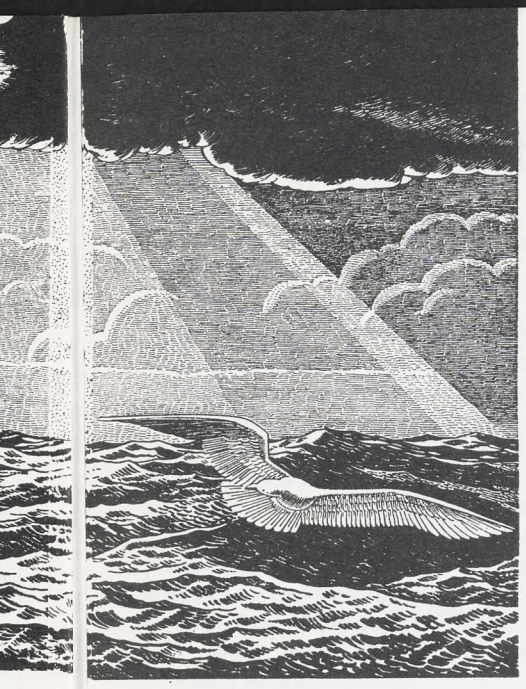


about the dismemberment of the goddess, and it set the stage for abuse and devaluation of the women who worshipped Yahweh.

It becomes clear how important the symbol of the serpent is among the symbols of the goddess, chaos, darkness, and evil for patriarchal religions which worshipped a father god of order, anger, and light. The transitional stage between the goddess herself and the serpent as symbol can be seen in the "terrible" manifestation of the goddess, which appears in several cultures. In Greek mythology Medusa was a horrible woman-monster who had hair of snakes and her gaze turned a person to stone. The Egyptian goddess of the underworld, Hathor, is seen as a vulture on earth and a serpent, Vadjet, in the underworld. In India, Kali is a black bloodthirsty diety in the form of a woman. She is pictured stroking cobras in her hands, or with a cobra around her waist.[20]

The serpent, who was invariably connected with the goddess, was not always associated with evil. There is much evidence to suggest that in the ancient Near and Middle East, the serpent was linked to wisdom, prophecy, and esoteric knowledge. It was worshipped as an oracular deity. [21] This brings us to another Old Testament creation account, the story of the fall. Here again, we find a serpent.

For people of biblical times, the presence of a serpent, a sacred fruit tree, and a woman who took the advice of the serpent may have signaled the familiar presence of the goddess.[22] The story of the fall may



have been designed as warning to worshippers of the goddess that such behavior (i.e. disobedience of the father god) had once caused all people to be expelled from their original home in paradise.[23] It is enlightening to look at some of the mythology that was alive at about the time that the story of the fall began.

On the island of Crete, the female deity was sometimes referred to as the serpent goddess.[24] She was often pictured with snakes wound around her breasts or writhing along her arms or, most frequently, holding a snake in either hand. [25] We also find a fruit tree represented in the iconography of Crete. Repeatedly, the goddess and her attendants are shown beside the tree.[26]

In Sumaria, the goddess Nidaba was the scribe of the Sumarian heaven, the patron deity of writing. She was at times depicted as a serpent and among her designations are "Divine Serpent Lady" and "Learned One of the Holy Chambers". The goddess Inanna (Innanni), who was closely connected with serpent worship, was called "The Divine Mother who Reveals Laws". Nina, the most ancient of the serpent goddesses in Sumaria, was known to be an oracular deity. A prayer to her taken from a Sumarian tablet includes the words, "O Nina of priestly rites, Lady of precious decrees, Prophetess of Deities art Thou."[27] Stephen Langdon writes, "The evidence points to an original serpent goddess as the interpreter of dreams of the unrevealed future." [28]

In Elam, just east of Sumar, archaeological evidence suggests a particularly strong reverence for the serpent goddess which had its roots in magic.[29] The Hebrew and Aramaic word for "magic" came from words that mean "snake." [30]

The Babylonian Ishtar was depicted in seals with a serpent-entwined scepter. She was often called a prophetess or "She who directs the oracles".[31] In legends, drawings, and sculptures of Athena, the Greek goddess of wisdom, the serpent appears. [32] In Delphi the priestesses who delivered the goddess' oracles were called the Pythia. A snake known as Python sat coiled around the stool upon which they sat. [33]

The strongest connections between the serpent and wisdom come from Egypt. At this point it might be helpful to recall that the Israelites, according to the Bible, spent several hundred years in Egypt. The date of the Exodus into Palestine was probably somewhere around 1300 B.C.B.[34] Biblical scholars place the writing of the story of the fall at about 950 B.C.E.[35] We can be sure that the memory of Egyptian mythology was still very present in the oral tradition of this time.

In Egypt, the picture of a cobra was the hieroglyphic sign for the word goddess. The cobra was known as the Eye, symbolic of mystic insight and wisdom.[36] The Creator-Primeval serpent of Egyptian mythology declares:

> *"I am the overflow of the Primeval Flood, He who emerged from the waters.*
> *I am the "Provider of Attributes" serpent with its many coils.*
> *I am the Scribe of the Divine Book Which says what has been said and effects what is yet to be."*[37]

The goddess Hathor of Egypt was worshipped as the Eye of Wisdom and the Serpent Lady. She was also known as the Lady of the Sycamore. The "fig tree", "Sycamore tree" and "Black mulberry tree" seem to be used interchangeably in this connection. The tree was known as the Body of Hathor on earth. To eat of it was to partake of the body of the Goddess. Some Egyptian murals depicted the goddess within this tree, passing out the fruit as the food of eternity and life after death.[38] Merlin Stone points out that in this context it is intriguing that when Adam and Eve discovered that they were naked, they made aprons of fig leaves to cover themselves.[39]

There was a second tree in the garden of Eden which was forbidden -- the tree of life. Yahweh banished Adam and Eve from the garden so that they would not eat of it and live forever. (Genesis 3:22) In addition to the fact that this sounds suspiciously like Hathor's sycamore or fig tree immortality is an idea almost universally connected with the serpent. Although it is not possible to clearly delineate what any particular mythological symbol exactly "means" universally, Eliade speaks of "webs" of themes which do seem to become universal. In a "web", a pattern of several symbols is nearly always seen occuring together. One such web is moon - water - woman - serpent - regeneration. Any one of these themes is nearly always found in company with some of the others.[40] "Regeneration" or immortality is one of the most important recurring meanings of the symbol of the snake. The serpent sheds its skin and appears to be born again. Like the woman, the moon, and the waters, it goes through cycles of change symbolic of death, rebirth, and the cyclical rhythm of the cosmos. This is another way in which the goddess is connected to the serpent.

It becomes apparent that for those who first heard the story of the fall, the presence of the serpent and the magical fruit tree had connotations which are lost to us now. This is borne out in the story itself. The serpent, according to the story, was created after Yahweh gave the command to Adam not to eat of the tree of good and evil (Genesis 2:19); yet in its conversation with the woman it knew the reason for that command (Gen. 3:5). The serpent, like the fruit of the tree, was connected with esoteric knowledge. It has correctly been observed that the serpent told the truth about the effects of eating of the tree ("You will not die"), and Yahweh did not. Something does not quite add up here -- one of the creatures of Yahweh seems to be wiser and more truthful than he is. I would suggest that the serpent, and expecially the serpent in conversation with the woman, is meant to connote the goddess and the ancient religions in

which serpents are the oracular deities and women are seen as full human beings. (the Hebrew *nahash*, which means "serpent" is almost exactly the same as the verb *nahash*, which only appears in the Piel and means "to observe signs and practice divination".[41]) One of Yahweh's punishments for disobedience in the story of the fall is to "Put enmity between (the serpent) and the woman" (Genesis 3:15). Can we now assume that there was good reason why the patriarchs of the Hebrew religion might want to put a stop to communication between the woman and the serpent?

The serpent's esoteric knowledge and wisdom might have to do with the fact that it, and the goddess, were far more ancient deities than Yahweh. It is interesting that in Proverbs 8, another female figure, Wisdom, emerges as one who existed before creation.

It is clear that the story of the fall was part of the continuing battle by the Levites to suppress female religion. Another purpose of the story was to explain the "place" of women and to make sure that they stayed there. Yahweh says to the woman, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." (Genesis 3:16). This combined with the woman's creation out of man and for man (Genesis 2:22-23) and her disobedience of Yahweh (Genesis 3:6; everyone has conveniently forgotten for 3,000 years that Adam was disobedient too), made the outrageous status of women seem perfectly reasonable.

All of the Old Testament creation stories were in some way a polemic against the goddess, and so against women. They worked. We have been believing them, on one level or another, for thousands of years. The worshippers of the male god Yahweh and/or his son have had to repeatedly call upon the original fabrication in order to legitimitize their rejection of all that is female, dark, and/or sensual. There is finally something very unconvincing about all this righteous battling for light, maleness, and dry unmessy rationality. Philo writes, "For it was fitting that man should rule over immortality and everything good, but woman over death and everything vile." [43] "It was the more imperfect and ignoble element, the female, that made a beginning of transgression and lawlessness, while the male made the beginning of reverence and modesty and all good, since he was better and more perfect." [44]

It is on this point that Tertullian becomes completely hysterical.

> *And do you not know that you are each an Eve? The sentence of God on this sex of your lives in this age: the guilt must of necessity live too. You are the devil's gateway: You are the unsealer of that forbidden tree: You are the first deserter of the divine law: you are she who persuaded him whom the devil was not valiant enough to attack. You destroyed so easily God's image, man. On account of your desert — that is, death — even the Son of God had to die.*[45]

It would be nice if we could laugh at these reversals, but they cut too deep, and the world has not changed all that much since they were written. Women have learned so effectively the lesson of our own "inherent evil" that an overwhelming number of women report that they feel "guilt" when they are raped or beaten by their husbands or sexually harassed. The myth of the fall is alive and well in the mass media and it brainwashes us every day. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of this is that this mythic system has not only legitimitized man's hatred and fear of women, but has also created hatred and distrust of ourselves. It becomes clear that the real "original sin" of women is believing the story of the fall and internalizing self-hatred and guilt.[46]

Stephen Crites suggests that the function of story is to orient people to the "great powers" that determine the reality of their world. For women, the supreme "great power" is patriarchy. The stories which surround us orient us to this particular "great power" very effectively. An end to patriarchy would mean not a reinterpretation of the Yahweh of the Bible, but an end to this father god. If the Bible records a continuing battle to suppress female religion, and thereby to oppress women, unless we come to understand biblical religion in a radically new way, there is no hope for real change. Again this is the pain of social revolution or conversion. It is a slow and lonely process. Our entire sacred story needs to shift. We need to start telling new stories . . .

Genesis One

In the beginning the patriarchy created the heaven and the earth. The Mother, earth, teemed with a chaos of life in all forms; green trees growing in jungles and forests of riotous beauty, animals running over plains and deserts, and waves crashing upon rocks and sand. The dark slow earth and the deeper waters of mystery were in harmony, and the patriarchy hovered above it all.

And the patriarchy said, "Let there be masculinity." And there was masculinity. And the patriarchy saw that the masculinity was intimidating; and the patriarchy separated the masculinity from the femininity. The patriarchy called the masculine "man", and the feminine it called "woman". And men and women became these things.

And the patriarchy said, "Let there be separations in the midst of the earth, and let them separate the people of the earth," for the patriarchy was afraid of the chaos of diversity. So it made the separations to separate the male, the white, the heterosexual, and the rich, from the female, the dark, the homosexual, and the poor. And it was so. And the patriarchy called the separations the Social Order. And the people learned to love only those who were on their side of the separations.

And the patriarchy said, "Let the powerful people gather together to use their power, and let the oppressed ones be silent." The patriarchy called

the powerful ones "Good" and "Pious", and the oppressed ones it called "Evil" and "Irrational". For it was afraid of what it had rejected in itself. And the patriarchy saw that it was thus enabled to hate the parts of itself that it feared.

And the patriarchy said, "Let us have power also over the earth itself. Let us subdue it, and let us control it." And the earth was gradually subdued. The green trees were cut down, and the chaos of beauty and growing of the forests and jungles slowly began to stop. The plains and the mountains began to be ravaged. The air was filled with poison, and the waters were choked with garbage. And the patriarchy saw that it was Progress. And the beautiful earth began to die.

And the patriarchy said, "Let there be morals and ethics, and let them help to keep this whole machine running, and let them protect individuals and society from the chaos of pain or ecstasy." And the patriarchy made good and evil, and arbitrarily fit human behavior into one or the other category, to separate the pious from the human. And the patriarchy saw that the pious were eternally legitimized, and the "evil" ones were declared insane

And the patriarchy said, "Let the creatures of the earth be killed, all kinds, and let us eat and wear them." And all the creatures began to be killed. And the patriarchy saw that it was all necessary for Progress. And the beautiful varieties of animals began to disappear, one by one.

Then the patriarchy said "Let us make a god in our own image, after our likeness, and let Him embody Masculinity." Let Him uphold the separation, and enforce the morals and ethics by inspiring Guilt and Fear." So the patriarchy created Yahweh in its own image, after its likeness.

And Yahweh blessed the patriarchy, and hallowed it, and said, "Go, in the name of Progress and subdue the earth. Bless the pious, and hate and fear the mad. I am light, rationality, omni/potence, and Good."

And the patriarchy worshipped its image.

Genesis Three

The Goddess, who brought forth from her body all things, watched when Yahweh created Adam and Eve. She was both amused and apprehensive. She could not remember which of her grandaughters had borne this young god, and his enthusiasm made her nervous. So after awhile, she visited Eden to see how Eve was getting along.

She said to Eve, "What did Yahweh tell you about the trees in the garden?" And Eve said, "We can eat of the fruit of all the trees except that tree which is the middle of the garden. Yahweh said if we ate of that tree, we would die." The Goddess laughed and said to the woman, "Do not let yourself be intimidated. This young god is getting carried away with his power. He knows that if you eat of this tree of Wisdom, you will become fully human. You will claim your own strength and leave the garden and Yahweh behind you. He wants to keep you around to serve him and keep Adam happy."

Eve thought about this. She looked at the ancient gnarled face of the Goddess, filled with ageless pain, ecstasy, and gentle strength. She did not want to look into the abyss of Her eyes,because she knew somehow that this would change her forever. She felt inexplicably alone. She said to the Goddess, "Adam will be back any minute with Yahweh. They outnumber me. I am afraid. What if I an left alone with this terrible new wisdom? To be like you would be too great a risk; I cannot embrace your madness.'

She babbled on and on, and the Goddess was deeply saddened. She left the young girl to her ruminations and went to find Adam. But he was even less able to understand than Eve. He kept ignoring her questions and finally grew angry and frustrated because She was so alien to him. He went back to Eve and told her never to talk to the Goddess again. Yahweh loudly agreed with Adam. Eve was too intimidated to protest. It was exactly as she had feared. She stayed in the garden to serve Adam and Yahweh in silence, and life in Eden ran smoothly.

The Goddess shook her head sadly, and said, although no one heard, "Because you have not listened to me, you are condemned to stay in the garden until you find in yourselves the courage and the wisdom to leave. You will have to find freedom out of the pain of your own experience.

"Adam, you will carry this masculinity trip of yours to monstrous proportions before you see its absurdity. By the time you understand your emptiness, you will have forgotten how to be gentle. You will have a hard time learning how to hear the buried parts of yourself, because the voice of this Yahweh of yours is so loud.

"Eve, you will become totally broken by your fear, too, before you rise up to claim your own power. By the time you understand your triviality, you will have forgotten how to be strong. You will have to be alone inside yourself; you will have to confront the Abyss. The longer you put that off, the more painful it will be. It will be difficult for you to embrace the madness, because you insist on believing what they tell you about it.

"When you both decide to grow up and trust your own minds and intuition, you will be fully human. It will take along time. But someday, you will be fully human. You will dream dreams and see visions. And you will have an abundant life filled with despair, ecstasy, madness — and new hope."

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